

Growing into Grace

Reflections on Gratitude



Stewardship Devotional Guide

Grace Episcopal Church
Traverse City, Michigan



Growing into Grace Reflections on Gratitude

Dear People of Grace,

The Stewardship Committee is pleased to give you this Devotional Guide to use during our stewardship campaign. Our theme this year is “Growing into Grace.” We envision stewardship to be grounded in gratitude, revealed in prayer, and lived in faith. Gratitude is the spiritual response to all the blessings we have been given by God.

As you read the reflections, thoughtfully written by members of the Grace community, we invite you to reflect on your own experiences with God, and your gratitude for God’s provision in your own life.

We are deeply grateful to all who took time out of their busy schedules to prepare a reflection as a gift to the Grace community. Their generosity makes this devotional possible.

We hope these reflections will help you to strengthen your faith as you “Grow into Grace.”

Yours in Christ,
The Stewardship Committee

Day One

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Romans 12:4-8

Reflection by Glenda Andrews

Since the age of seven, I have physically felt the love and protection of God’s arms. How this came about is not important to my faith, but only the knowledge that God has been at my side loving and guiding me in every aspect of my life to this very day.



God watched over me while growing up and, when I was old enough to understand who and what this presence I felt was, He guided me so I would learn of this love and how to love my neighbor as myself.

I believe God gives everyone of us a gift He wants us to use on this earth to love, teach, heal, and comfort His children. My gift is to show God’s love to those who need it most desperately. God gave me the vision to see and feel suffering and to give His compassion of comfort and love to those He sends to me. I still have many miles to go in my faith, but I know that God is always there to pick me up, brush me off, and send me on my way without judgment, but with all of His love down His chosen path.

When I am overwhelmed, I remember Mother Teresa’s words: “Never worry about the numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you.”

Prayer

Holy Father, My prayer is for thankfulness. Thankful that I feel your presence always in my heart. Thankful that I know of your complete pure love for me. Thankful that you use this love to do your will. You let me see the beauty in all things and give me all that sustains me. You are there when I need strength and forgive me of my weakness. I know I am always in the shelter of your arms where your love protects me. Amen.

Glenda is a “cradle” Episcopalian and a member of Grace since 2006.

Day Two

For surely I know the plans I have for you says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me.

Jeremiah 29:11-14

Reflection by Erika Shenk-Tessin

I have been part of the church's landscape for almost eight years. Three years ago on my porch, late at night, I heard the voice of God say "I have a plan for you..." My life changed after that. I began to talk with God, to start asking the questions, knowing I would have to listen for answers...I did, and the answers came.

The people within the walls of Grace came, offering support, lending an ear, opening their hearts, and welcoming me to the fold.

Since my Baptism, just 18 months ago, my life hasn't stopped changing. My relationships within Grace have grown stronger, within my family more loving, and within my yoga community—Christian yogis have surfaced and bonds have been made. I finally don't feel like a tumbleweed blowing through life. I feel as though I have a home anywhere that I am, so long as I can find my voice and speak with God.

Prayer

Dear Lord,
Thank you for this new morning and its light,
For rest and shelter of the night,
For health and food, for love and friends,
For every gift your goodness sends
I thank you, gracious Lord. Amen.

Erika is a Christian, mother, wife, sister, friend, gardener, yogi, and seeker of truth.



Day Three

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2

Reflection by Chuck Wolterink

I've been thinking about Don Espy, who died recently and whose funeral was held at Grace in October. "Hobo Don" was a familiar figure at Jubilee House for years. He struggled with poverty, homelessness, alcohol, cancer, and who knows what else. He also struggled with his faith, which seemed to be a source of both profound comfort and intense guilt.



I did not know Hobo Don very well, but I had a memorable conversation with him at the Christmas Eve service at Jubilee House last year. We happened to be standing next to each other after the service. We greeted each other and shook hands, and, without preamble, he began to tell me about forgiveness.

Don spoke of his own deep need to be forgiven, his belief that he had been forgiven and was continually being forgiven, and his certainty that such forgiveness was available to everyone. I don't remember his specific words, but I remember his intensity and, in particular, the depth and tenderness in his eyes. It would be easy to say that he was probably just drunk—he said so himself. But I do not often feel that I am in the presence of the holy, and I felt that that was at least a real possibility that day. For that I am grateful.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for forgiving us, even when we may not know we need to be forgiven, and for teaching us how to forgive each other. And thank you for reminding us that you are present in what seem to be the unlikeliest of places: in an unwed mother at a manger, in the ramblings of a homeless alcoholic, and even in us. Amen.

I participate in Chancel Choir, Grace Harmony, Episcopal Peace Fellowship, Food Pantry, Friday Lunch and Vestry.

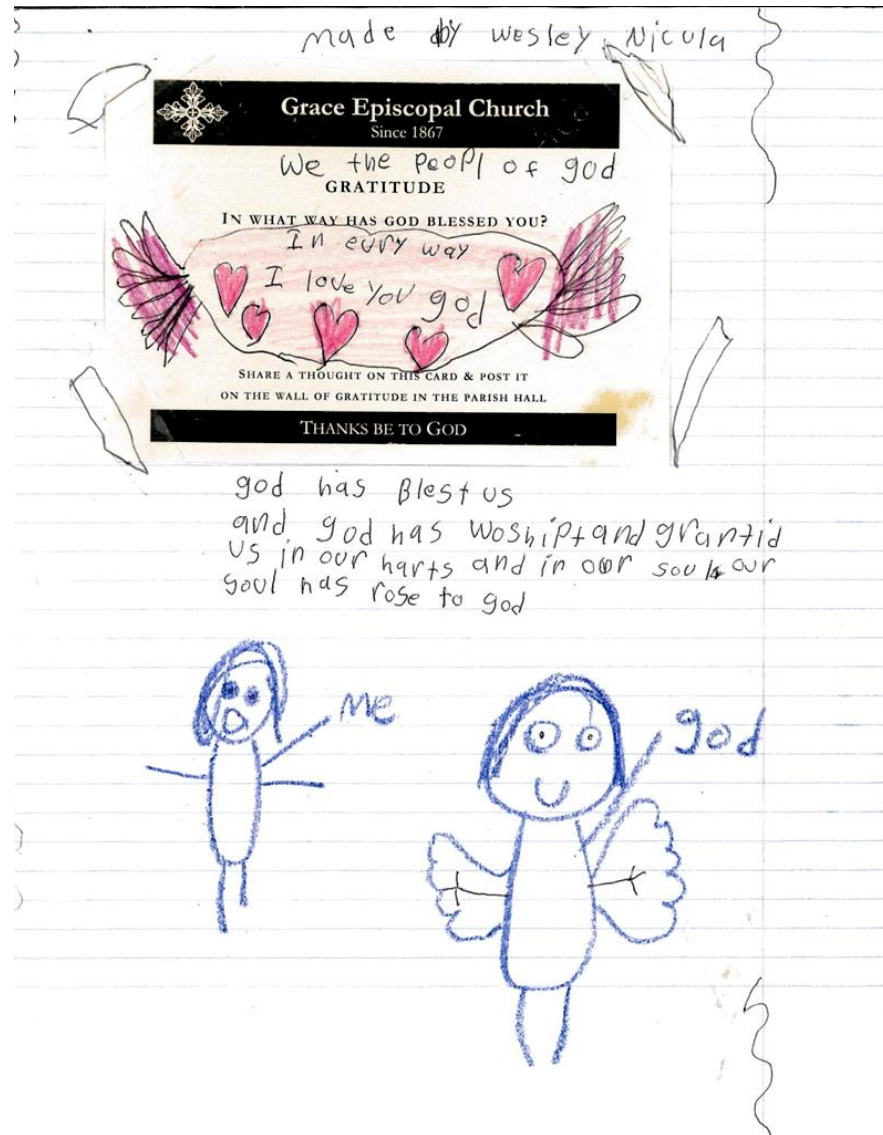
Day Four

Out of the mouths of infants and children your majesty is praised above the heavens.

Psalms 8:2



Reflection by Wesley Nicula



Day Five

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters, he restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His namesake ... My cup runneth over! ... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalms 23

Reflection by Jennifer Weil

Pressures mounted last spring, coming, as they often do, in multiples and a variety of guises. Overarching all the challenges was the agony of abiding with my beloved dog as her life ebbed. When she was gone, I could scarcely remain in my skin, much less comfort my husband. My grief grew fierce and dark as a tornado, and I felt *anything* but grateful. Nonetheless, I knew that an attitude of gratitude was the best gift I could give myself. Again and again, I turned to the twenty-third psalm. I walked long distances repeating the verses in rhythm with my footsteps. I heard them in my head as I swam laps, made dinner, paid bills, dealt with yet another call, another decision. Sometimes, I prayed the psalm through tears and found an oasis of peace.



I am grateful for David, who prayed the beloved twenty-third and passed it to posterity. Space did not permit including the whole psalm here—and I do love its wholeness!—yet, even abridged, the psalm is full. Paraphrase it, recite a single verse. No matter: Its essence remains, and the essence of gratitude is what counts. Though its expression may be awkward and foreign, the healing power of gratitude is immune to human clumsiness.

I may not always know the myriad miracles surrounding me, may be blind to an answer I do not want. Steady on! There is this to know: The transforming miracle of God's wise and loving word. So I pray:

Prayer

God, Light of All Creation
thank you for the strength I need to
keep my feet to the path,
my heart open,
and my mind hewing to the Truth. Amen.

To love is to do. Believes Jesus was the first libertarian.

Day Six

by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...

Ephesians 2:8

Reflection by Donna Olendorf

My husband has always been a restless sleeper, so I wasn't terribly concerned when he had a bout of insomnia in the summer of 2008. But as the days turned into weeks, we both knew something was wrong. Before Don could get in to see his doctor, he suffered an attack of severe abdominal pain and ended up in the Emergency Room.



Don endured x-rays, CAT scans, and endless rounds of sophisticated tests. After weeks of uncertainty, we got an appointment with a Beaumont surgeon who delivered a diagnosis. The news was grim. The dark spot was a pancreatic endocrine tumor. The surgeon advised us to live each day to the fullest, keep our faith, and to put our affairs in order.

In the weeks that followed, I prayed that God in his mercy would return my husband to health just as Jesus had healed centurion's servant as he entered into Capernaum (Luke 7: 1-7). On the day of the surgery our parish priest, who was the hospital chaplain, came to pray with us before Don was wheeled into the operating room.

Many people who undergo pancreatic surgery have cancer too advanced for the operation to proceed, some people get the surgery but the cancer still remains, and a very few have cancer that is restricted to a tumor that has not yet spread. Praise be to God - that was the tumor Don had. The surgery, while extensive, was completely successful and today Don is in excellent health and cancer free.

I am grateful for the gift of my husband's life and for the health that has been returned to him.

Prayer

May God the Father bless you, God the Son heal you, God the Holy Spirit give you strength. Amen.

Donna Olendorf is the GEC webmaster and clerk of the vestry.

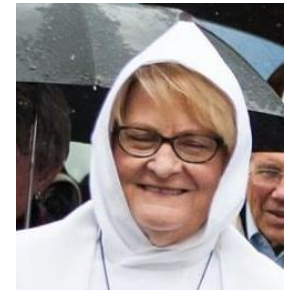
Day Seven

"...all I have needed your hands have provided." From the hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness"

Reflection by The Rev. Katheryn King

My Dad was a worker man.

He broke his family's mold when as an only son, he left the farm, moved to the big city and went to trade school. Being a tool and die machinist was not just on the job...he had a fully outfitted shop in the basement with every machinist tool imaginable. And if he did not have the right tool, he always invented it.



Every Sunday he would make out the offering and stick it in an envelope and put the envelope in his bench vice – so he would not forget to bring it to Church. I never knew the amount. It could have been \$10 or \$10,000 (probably not) but I vividly remember that offering – sticking out of the vice.

I am grateful my Dad provided for his family, his church, and provided a model of faithful giving to me.

Prayer

Good and gracious God, all thanks and praise to you, "For life and health and daily bread we give you thanks, O Lord." Amen.
(This prayer may be sung as a round.)

Pr. Katheryn, woman of God, thankful for life, love, and Loki.

Day Eight

Show me your ways, O Lord, and teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me.
Psalm 25:3-4

Reflection by Ann Hackett

As I write, this verse suddenly strikes me. As a former teacher, I didn't choose these words for that reference, but what a coincidence. Or not. God is showing me the way....again.

There is something you should know. I was not a good Christian for many years. I put God off. Oh sure, I attended worship services because I hadn't "been in a while," I joined in ministry work only when invited and I placed offerings in the plate, but I never made a pledge. God has been patient with me.



He and I had a conversation in the car driving home several years ago when I desperately needed His attention. I felt I had no right to petition Him for anything because I offered little reverence or love for God. So what happened? God's answer was to put me to work in a church, and, for some reason, I didn't resist. I had to trust God, and now I believe it's no accident that I work at Grace. God's plan was total immersion! I am learning to accept God's will and to focus less on my own. And I'm grateful beyond measure for working, praying and learning in this church community at this time in my life.

Prayer

Lord, let our minds rest in your word, so that when doubt and grief would overwhelm us, faith will open our eyes to see your hand at work in our life. Amen.

Ann grew up in Rhode Island and found love in Pittsburgh.

Day Nine

No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Reflection by Bill Montgomery

When I first read this passage from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, I thought that he was writing to me. Several years ago, I stood in the noon sun of a summer day in Ephesus, I had thought of what Paul would have said to me if I had been one of the Ephesians sitting with this short man with the squeaky voice. It wasn't 'till several years later that I found this passage and knew that I had received my answer.



Five years ago my life stood still when I received a cancer diagnosis. For several weeks, I was angry and fearful of what lay ahead. My oncologist pointed to changes in my life that would be required. Among them were a strict diet excluding alcohol and red meat and simplifying our lives by selling our seldom used Dallas house. The effect of those two changes has been to provide the motivation to write a book aimed at helping others and to spend more time on public service. I have a much stronger sense that I belong to Jesus.

Viewing my last five years through the lens of this passage, I see the Lord has made many positive changes through the cancer diagnosis. My faith and the steadfast support of my wife Anne are the beacons on my journey. I know that God has brought me to a better place through adversity. I am eternally grateful.

Prayer

Dear Lord,
Thank you for being a strong influence in my life.
I pray that I will always face both difficulties and blessings with gratitude.
Amen.

Grace Episcopalian, grateful husband and father, budding author and tireless reader.

Day Ten

...Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our...

Matthew 6:11-12

Reflection by Gloria Veltman

...sins, debts, trespasses. Each one of these terms is meaningful in and of itself. Trespasses for instance, the term used in our Rite One, is suggestive to me of crossing a line; a boundary or border. A line taking me from a course compatible with God's will to one on a path of error. This line is itself a gift from the Creator. Debts and debtors, which my Christian Science friends and others use, suggests to me how much we are given by our Lord and, therefore, how much we owe. Debts owed to others and ourselves for our sins of commission and omission. Debts and debtors also recognize our human tendency to incur debts by making unwise and unkind choices. Sins, which we at Grace now use, has an age-less quality which goes back nearly two thousand years to the Crucifixion where Christ paid our accumulated debts.



Prayer

Lord, whatever term we use; sins, debts or trespasses, help us to be more attentive as we pray the perfect prayer, the prayer your son taught. Amen.

Gloria was an Episcopalian but didn't know it until 1984.

Day Eleven

But above all bless your Maker who fills you with his good gifts.

Ecclesiasticus 32:13

Reflection by Penny Campo-Pierce

Several years ago a song inspired me to dust off my Sign Language dictionary so I could give greater expression to the words. Since then I've grown closer to God by praying with more than my mouth. Many of you have told me my signing increases what you feel from the words you are seeing. How wonderful! It is exactly how I feel each time I sign.



A recent conversation brought about this mediation. Picture a modern day royal person with the sash across their chest; this is the base for several God-centered words. Each word will have the Right hand moving from the left shoulder to the right hip.



King – Make a V with the fingers of your right hand and put your thumb where they meet on palm.

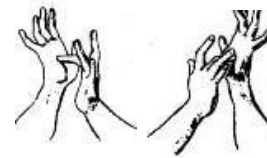


With the fingers of your right hand, form an L. You have signed Lord.



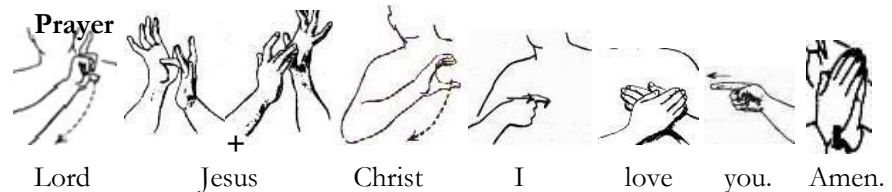
Form a C with your right hand. Any guesses? That's right! Christ.

The person I spoke with specifically asked how to sign Jesus. When I made the sign for her and explained it, tears sprang to her eyes.



Both "5" hands are used. The left middle finger touches the right palm, and then the right middle finger touches the left palm. (The marks of the crucifixion.)

If you have any questions or would like to add Sign to your prayer life, please, just ask :-)



Penny Campo-Pierce: Daughter of the King, signing singer, librarian.

Day Twelve

“Come, let us have it out!” says the Lord.

Isaiah 1:18

Reflection by Catherine Turnbull

These words thrill me. I leap toward the invitation they contain to take the texts and tradition I’ve inherited and to work at interpreting them: to listen, think, speak, and *wrestle* with my Creator/Holy Word/Holy Spirit. To make of my life its own text; one that changes as I am changed by the wrestling.



It’s this joy—the joy of “having it out,” that I’m most grateful to share in my role on Grace Church’s staff. I love joining our compassionate, brave youth program volunteers as we immerse ourselves and our youngest members in sacred, traditional, and personal stories of faith. That we can endeavor to knit together what we know about how kids learn and what we believe about spiritual guidance is a mighty gift.

Perhaps I love my role so much because it’s been the sharing of stories that has joined me to this community. I’ve never been a person who slips into the back of a church, sinks deeply into myself during worship, and then slips back out before the postlude has faded without speaking to anyone beyond saying, “Peace be with you.” I’ve been more of a question-cruncher. Being involved in study groups has been crucial to my faith. If God comes to others in song or dream or scripture or service, God comes to me in friendship.

It’s been forty years of listening, reading, and telling that has made me into a Christian. *Makes* me into a Christian. Exactly the way stones are always somewhere in the rock cycle even if it looks like they’re going nowhere. My staff job at Grace is a blessed reminder that we’re in this God thing for the long wrestle.

Prayer

Mother of Grace, be present to us in each other. Open our hearts to love, open our ears to hear, open our hands to help, open our mouths to tell. Amen.

Catherine Turnbull is Director of Children and Youth Formation at Grace Church.

Day Thirteen

O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; praise him and magnify him for ever.

Canticle 1, A Song of Creation, BCP

Reflection by Chuck Stuart

As some of you know, our daughter Anne died on October 19, 2000. She had been diagnosed with A.L.S. (Lou Gehrig’s disease) in 1992 at Christmas time. We are deeply grateful for the prayers and concerns for Anne and all of us during that time.



When Anne was first diagnosed, we prayed, in our denial, that somehow it was a mistake and would all go away. That did not happen. Then with each new experimental treatment, we prayed that this would be the answer and she would get no worse. That did not happen either.

Finally, we prayed for a miracle. And we received a miracle! Oh to be sure it was not the miracle for which we were praying, but it was a miracle none-the-less. For Anne’s spirit remained resolute and positive to the end, and when the time came for her to step through the mists that cloud our vision of what lies beyond, she slipped into that freeing life of healing, peacefully, in her own home, in her own bed, and surrounded by family. Is that not the stuff of which miracles are made?

My wife Judy and I are thankful for the gift of Anne.

We are thankful for her 37 years among us.

We are thankful for all that she taught us about living and dying.

And, as we approach the Holy Season of Christmas,

We are thankful for the One born into the world so many years ago whose life and death have somehow helped us find meaning through it all.

Prayer

O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then of thy mercy grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

Chuck Stuart is a retired Episcopal priest and summer parishioner.

Day Fourteen

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

Genesis 1:31

Reflection by Jeanie Rhodes

In the late summer of 2013, I was hospitalized for a difficult to diagnose facial infection. During that hospitalization, I had the most profound spiritual experiences of my life.

I had the amazing opportunity to witness The Creation. Had it happened once, I might have thought it was a dream. But after the second time, there was no doubt what I had experienced was very real.



The Rev. Wally Draeger visited me in the hospital after these experiences. He had no doubt as to their validity, having had out-of-body experiences himself.

The show that was presented to me was more like a Walt Disney production, in Big Technicolor. The first event was like unfolding cards with pictures of The Creation. What I saw for the first time, ever, were white Orbs of brilliant light, and somehow it was quite clear to me that these were our Spirits after we leave this physical life form. All that is in this amazing place are Orbs of unbelievably brilliant lights, and all they know is Unconditional Love. There is no want for anything, no need, no war, no hate, no starvation, no disease, no anger, no greed, but just Unconditional Love. It was absolutely wonderful. The second time was similar, and I tried to find my parents among the Orbs. It was not possible for me to do so, possibly because all they're made up of His Spirit and Unconditional Love. No Hell, though, and that is a really Big Item for most people to accept. We are all Welcome in God's Kingdom.

I discussed this with three theologians, all representing different denominations. Amazingly, they all concurred on one thing: perhaps what I experienced is right out of Genesis, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Alleluia, Alleluia!

Prayer

Let us all rejoice, as we have been abundantly blessed. Amen.

Fairly new to Grace Church, Jeanie knows she's "home."

Day Fifteen

Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Joshua 1:9

Reflection by Nancy Flowers

This verse was written in my Book of Common Prayer on April 10th, 1982 by my parents signed "our love always, Mother and Dad". I am blessed to have parents that made God and the Church a part of my life from birth, and I have never questioned that they and He have my back. That is a gift I am eternally grateful for and I believe it gave me the strength and courage to go after life wholeheartedly.



I am blessed in more ways than I can count: a wonderful husband, two healthy children, a beautiful home, many, many people I get to call friends and a job I truly enjoy. I read this verse often and thank God for being with me wherever I go.

Prayer

Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.

Wife, daughter, mother, sister, friend blessed with an abundant life.

Day Sixteen

Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!

1 Chronicles 16:11

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

Reflection by Polly Suszan

When I was 16 years old we moved to Jacksonville, Florida. As a young teenager I was eager to find friends and ended up getting a job taking care of a woman in her 40's who had significant multiple sclerosis. She had suffered physical and emotional pain as her husband left her once he heard of her debilitating diagnosis and she lived with her aging parents. She hired teenage girls to stay overnight and help her get ready for bed and get up to the bathroom in the middle of the night. We would leave for school in the morning.



I ended up attending many healing services with Mary during my junior year of high school at the local Episcopal Church as I felt most comfortable with the liturgy as a practicing Episcopalian. I spent many an evening pouring my teenage heart out to her of my angst and woes of a struggling to fit in as the "new" girl. Although she was never physically healed, her strength came from her faith, and in turn she gave me strength to get through what I thought was a stressful junior year at a new high school.

I later went on to become a nurse in the military for 26 years! Was it Mary that encouraged me down that path? I wonder.

Prayer

For by grace given me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. (Rom 12:3)

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. (Ps 23:6) Amen.

Daughter, sister, wife, aunt, mom, retiree, and grandma who spends time between Traverse City and Tampa.

Day Seventeen

In the beginning God created heaven and earth....And God saw everything that God had made and that it was very good.

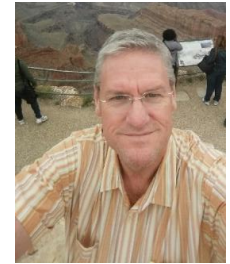
Genesis 1:1, 31

Reflection by Dave Eitland

I am a fan of Martin Luther. When Luther was asked for an explanation of the phrase in the Lord's Prayer "Give us today our daily bread," in part he wrote in the Large Catechism of *The Book of Concord*:

"... as that we pray God to give us food and drink, clothing, house, and home, and health of body; also that God cause the grain and fruits of the field to grow and mature well; furthermore, that God helps us at home towards good housekeeping, that God gives and preserve to us a godly wife (spouse), children, and servants, that God causes our work, trade, or whatever we are engaged in to prosper and succeed, favor us with faithful neighbors and good friends..... Likewise, that God gives to (all rulers) wisdom, strength, and success that they may govern well and vanquish ... all enemies; to subjects and the common people, obedience, peace, and harmony in their life with one another; and on the other hand, that God would preserve us from all sorts of calamity to body and livelihood, as lightning, hail, fire, flood, poison, pestilence, cattle-plague, war and bloodshed, famine, destructive beasts, wicked men...."

God created and gives us all good things.



Prayer

O God, give us all, every day, your gifts. Amen.

Dave loves God, Katheryn, Leah, Loki, and his work.

Day Eighteen

May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

Reflection by Dixie Stephen

When I returned from grocery shopping on a June day in 1996, my husband Jim was sitting at the dining room table in considerable pain. At the emergency room, the doctors suspected that we were dealing with a tumor in the area of the pancreas or liver. A subsequent bone scan was devastating; it was cancer and it had metastasized to several areas of his body. There was no doubt—it would be terminal.



I recall wanting to run and hide, to scream to the heavens that this could not be true. I left the building and blindly walked to the abandoned “Building 50.” I sat on a set of concrete steps, my entire being wracked with sobs and consumed with fear; that this gentle man that I loved so dearly would have to endure this nightmare. I ranted at God.

When I returned to the hospital ward, Thomas, our seminary intern, was at the nursing desk. He saw my distress, led me across the hall to a waiting room, sat in a chair in front of me, set a box of Kleenex on his knees and listened to my (mostly incoherent) sobbing story.

There was a rap on the door. Thomas reached up and opened the door. A young woman with an infant in her arms asked if this was a waiting room. Thomas said, “No” and closed the door. I was startled at his abruptness. He said, “There are times when you just have to be rude.” We laughed. He recited the priestly blessing from Philippians 4:7: “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” We would be held up by Grace. I am grateful.

Prayer

Lord, help us to remember that with faith we have peace and grace through Christ. Amen.

Dixie Stephen is a member of the Grace Vestry.

Day Nineteen

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

Reflection by Mike Cotter

I cannot imagine my life without daily prayer and the strength and support I receive in return. Being able to talk with Christ Jesus is a divine gift that I truly cherish in my heart. However, also within my heart lives a sadness that this gift of the ability to communicate in prayer is not universal in our world. I have many close friends who do not welcome faith or prayer as a part of their lives. What do they do when they need strength in their lives? Perhaps I have not prayed enough to get an answer to that question. Perhaps I have not prayed enough to gather the courage to ask them why they do not pray or to pray with me.



One way that I have discovered I am able to strengthen my individual prayer life is by joining in communal prayer through weekly worship and ministry participation as a member of the Grace Church community. My life at Grace not only strengthens my individual prayer life, it inspires, revitalizes, and deepens my faith.

In a similar manner, as an artist I can sit for hours upon hours, even days in my studio and not be motivated. I then come to a standstill on the piece I am creating. When this happens, if I get out of the studio and go out into the world and not just see the outside world but really look closely at that world or I visit a gallery or museum and really study the pieces of work I see, this gives me the strength and insight to return to my studio and see my work with a new perspective. Gratefully, through this process and with God’s help, I gain a renewed interest in what I was working on or even scrap it all and start all over again with a new beginning.

Prayer

Dear God, be all my love, all my hope, and all my endeavor;
let my thoughts emanate from you,
let my daily life be lived by you,
and let every breath I take be filled with joy for you. Amen.

Mike is a grateful individual in God’s universe, husband, father and visual artist.

Day Twenty

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7

Reflection by Barbara Klugh

One Monday in June, I was working at the Grace office helping to count and prepare the weekend offerings for deposit. I noticed that the atmosphere in the Commons was keyed up and full of visitors. I learned that Pastor Katheryn would be presiding over a memorial service for a patron of Jubilee House at 11 am.



Later on, as my partner and I were working, we heard loud music coming from the sanctuary. It was a recording of Bob Seger singing his terrific pop song “Old Time Rock and Roll—the kind of music that just soothes the soul.” No, it wasn’t “Amazing Grace,” but I’m sure this song was chosen to give the dear departed a great sendoff and was very significant to his loved ones. And that’s what matters at all funerals.

Later I learned that Baypointe Church hosted a beautiful luncheon in our Parish Hall for family and friends of the deceased. I understand why Daniel calls the large network of Christian Churches in our community “The Church of Traverse City.”

What an amazing church we have! We not only have the opportunity to serve the less fortunate through Jubilee House, the pantry, and other ministries, but we also give the departed a meaningful funeral that allows family and friends to say goodbye. Although I’m not directly involved in the Jubilee House ministry, I know my financial giving supports this and many ministries, allowing me to make a difference in the lives of countless people—even people I’ll never meet. So am I a cheerful giver? Yes, I am!

Prayer

O God, who raised up gifted and faithful servants to serve in and through Grace Church: give to all your servants, lay and ordained, abundant gifts of your Holy Spirit, that we may minister in your household as true servants of Christ and stewards of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Baptized at Grace in 1997, Barbara has never looked back.

Day Twenty-one

They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

Reflection by Lynn Watson

This verse has been and continues to be my mantra in times of crisis or despair. When my husband was diagnosed with kidney failure, then heart disease and finally cancer, there were many days and weeks when we both wondered if we could make it through.



I am thankful for his faith and, most of the time, a positive spin on the situation. That, combined with my faith and the wonderful support of the people of Grace, turned a desperately sad and frightening experience into, ultimately, memories of the love and compassion we received from our family and friends.

I’ll always be grateful for the strength I received, and continue to receive, from Spirit and the Grace Community.

Prayer

Spirit, help me to remember I can always turn inward to receive the strength and hope I need. May I return that Grace by showing concern and compassion for others. Amen.

Lynne Watson, an eternal student of the sacred Journey!

GRATITUDE AND COMMITMENT

Teaching the Lord's Prayer for the twentieth time I had a profound revelation, or rather Jan Dunkelberg did. He pointed out this connection between "Give us this day our daily bread," and "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

It is difficult to forgive others if we are afraid. We are afraid when we don't have faith that our daily bread will be provided.

Many of us are trained to be fearful, even fearful of having our basic needs met in the wealthiest country in the world. When we live with a low-grade perpetual fear, it destroys our ability to forgive but even more to be committed to the Rule of God in our lives.



That commitment is so central to our belonging to God in Christ. Jesus said, "Seek first God's Rule, and all of these things will be given to you." He said this in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:33 to be specific, right after saying that we should not worry about what we will wear or eat because these things will be given to us. Read it. Matthew 6 can change your life.

So how do we shape our lives to that commitment? The scriptural prerequisite is to "*remember* what the Lord has done." I can't even cite a verse, there are so many. Remember how God has poured out blessing after blessing for you. Write them down. Post them around your house.

We make lists to remember what we need at the store, what we need to do. Those future needs we keep before us as a litany of the unfulfilled. Good. But better to keep a list before us with those of the fulfilled promises of God. Remember.

You are so blessed. We come to the great thanksgiving to hope but first to remember. God has given us so much; we can make our commitment to God's Rule in confidence, in a peace that passes all understanding.

daniel+

THANK YOU NOTE

Thank you, LORD

For ordinary things;

Sun and snow

Erin and Ian*

Chickadees and doves

Flowers and snowflakes

Coffee and juice

Hot showers and warm beds.

In these ordinary things

We see the Hand of the Extra-Ordinary.

—*Gloria Veltman*

*Gloria's Shetland sheepdog twins.